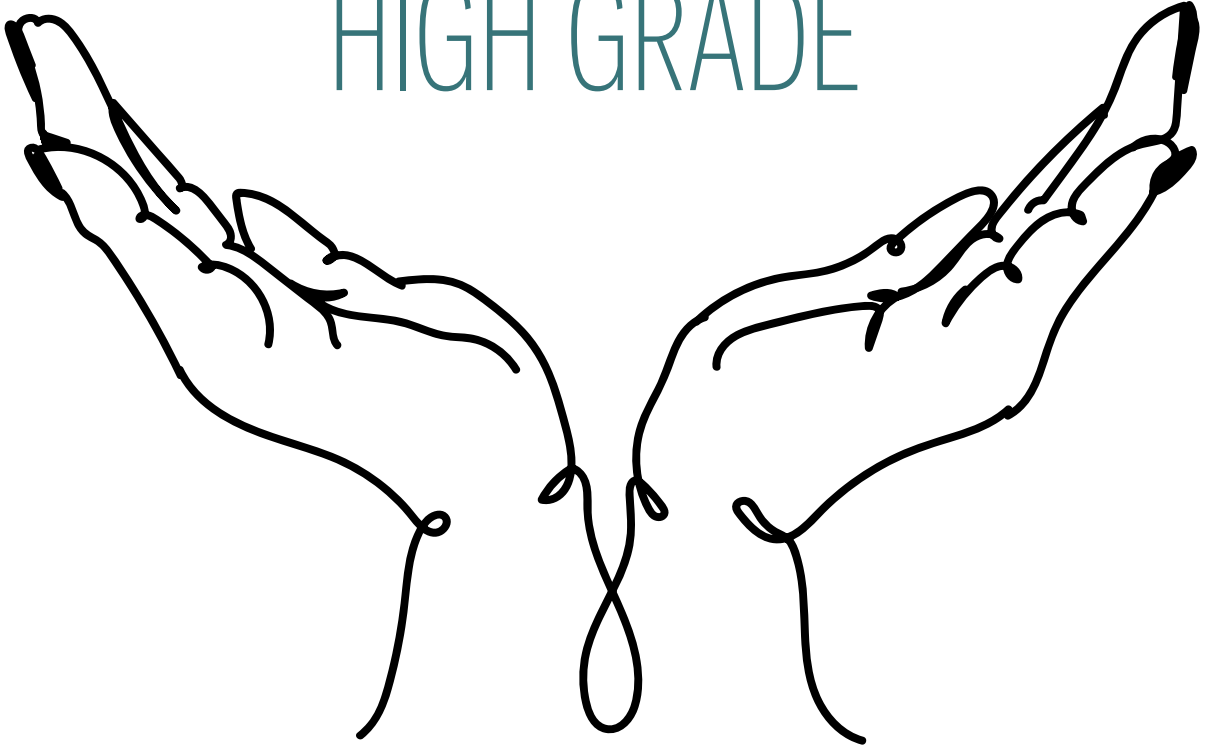


HIGH GRADE



COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Toni Lefton, the creative community at Mines, the Division of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, the Board of Student Media, Undergraduate Student Government, Foothills Art Center, and Egan Printing Company for making this journal possible.

STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jade Njo

FACULTY ADVISOR & MANAGING EDITOR
Toni Lefton

LAYOUT & DESIGN EDITOR
Lucia Grande

LAYOUT & DESIGN STAFF
Jun Johari
Piper Nichols

ART EDITORS
Tara Buzinski
Lilah Slaughter

ART STAFF
Shane Cranor
Kyle Markowski
Dhruva Sogal
John Whatley

POETRY EDITOR
John Whatley

POETRY STAFF
Wenli Dickinson
Jun Johari
Kyle Markowski

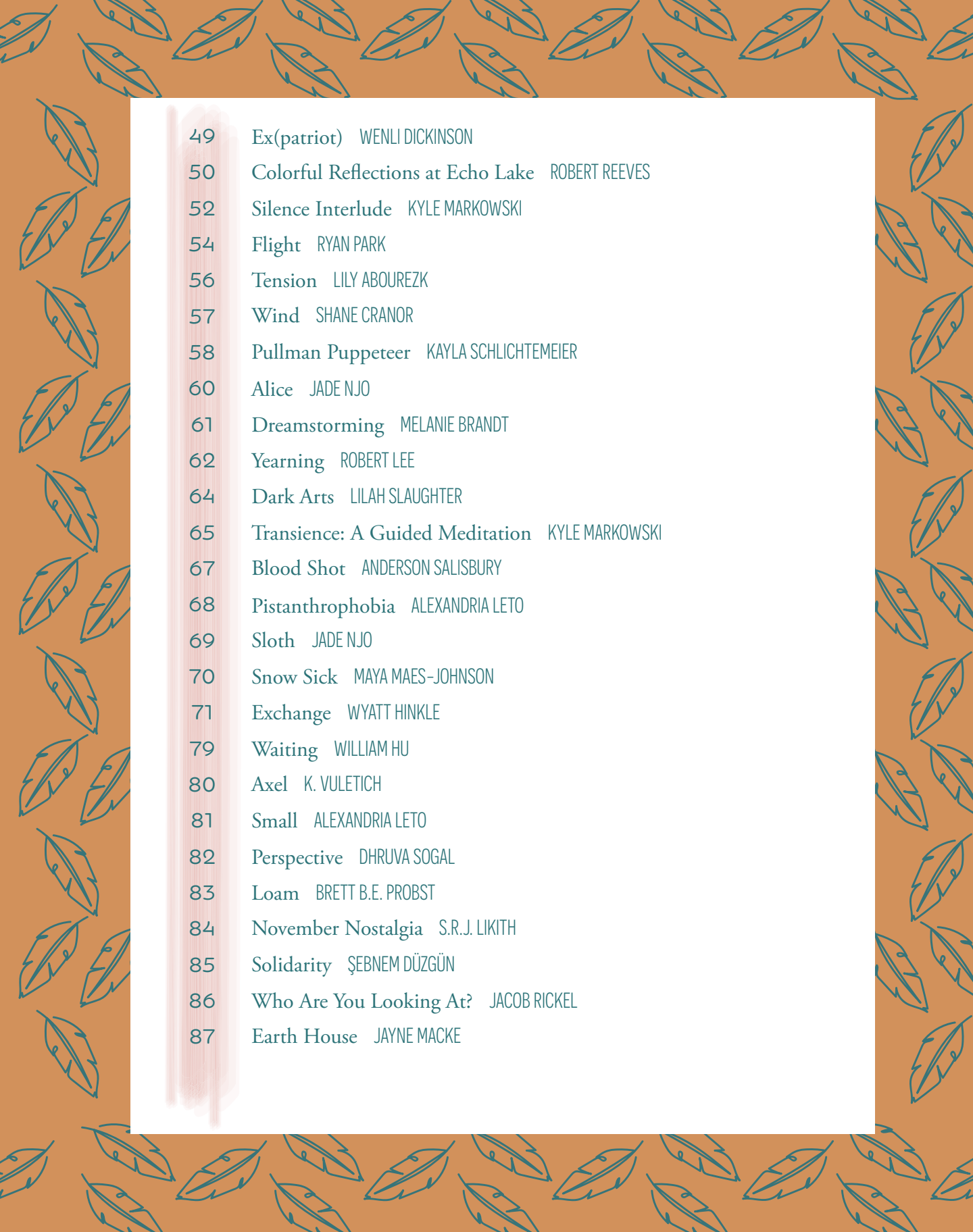
FICTION EDITOR
Mary Collins

FICTION STAFF
Wenli Dickinson
Lucia Grande
Kyle Markowski

MUSIC EDITOR
Shane Cranor

WEBMASTER
Alexandria Leto

- 
- 9 If You Could Wear the Rain KEARA BARRON
10 Mt. of the Holy Cross XAN MCPHERSON
12 Domestic Settling S.Y. CHEN
13 Rocky Mountain Rapids ANNA CHANDLER
14 Confined LILY ABOUREZK
15 Vase of Waves ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN
16 Uncommon Friends JACOB RICKEL
17 Sonnet of the Fool ZABDIYEL TAN
18 Nature's Potrait JACOB RICKEL
19 Heaven for the Animal Kingdom KEARA BARRON
23 Bobby the Otter ALEX CLYMER
24 Centralia KAREN KLOSKE
25 Seasons Collide MAX PHANNENSTIEL
26 Breaking Dawn JESSICA FIALA
27 Shelter in Place WYATT HINKLE
30 Germination SUSAN FENDER
31 Heron Home MARK BALDWIN
32 Yak at High Altitude JESSICA HIATT
34 Stay In Your Lane 2019 REBECCA MICHALCZYK
35 Traveler ERIKA STROMERSON
36 Chaotic Ode KYLE MARKOWSKI
40 Red White and Blue TALA TAHERNIA
42 Guardabarranco VICTOR BAEZ
44 Violation JANE TUREK
45 Interviewing the Americas S.Y. CHEN
47 Dancing Fire MARC A. HERRERA
48 A Plea REBECCA MICHALCZYK

- 
- 49 Ex(patriot) WENLI DICKINSON
50 Colorful Reflections at Echo Lake ROBERT REEVES
52 Silence Interlude KYLE MARKOWSKI
54 Flight RYAN PARK
56 Tension LILY ABOUREZK
57 Wind SHANE CRANOR
58 Pullman Puppeteer KAYLA SCHLICHTEMEIER
60 Alice JADE NJO
61 Dreamstorming MELANIE BRANDT
62 Yearning ROBERT LEE
64 Dark Arts LILAH SLAUGHTER
65 Transience: A Guided Meditation KYLE MARKOWSKI
67 Blood Shot ANDERSON SALISBURY
68 Pistanthrophobia ALEXANDRIA LETO
69 Sloth JADE NJO
70 Snow Sick MAYA MAES-JOHNSON
71 Exchange WYATT HINKLE
79 Waiting WILLIAM HU
80 Axel K. VULETICH
81 Small ALEXANDRIA LETO
82 Perspective DHRUVA SOGAL
83 Loam BRETT B.E. PROBST
84 November Nostalgia S.R.J. LIKITH
85 Solidarity ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN
86 Who Are You Looking At? JACOB RICKEL
87 Earth House JAYNE MACKE

ONLINE CONTENT

View more amazing content on the *High Grade* website highgrade.mines.edu. With limited print space, the website enables additional pieces to be featured. Enjoy more visual art, fiction, and music from talented contributors.

VISUAL ART

A Day in the Forest JACOB RICKEL
Envy JADE NJO
Girasol JULIA VAUGHN
Honey Bee #1 K. VULETICH
Maya K. VULETICH
Mother DHRUVA SOGAL
Mt. Sopris, Colorado XAN MCPHERSON
Things Left Behind K. VULETICH

FICTION

The Long Way JOSHUA LEYBA
Universe on Empty WYATT HINKLE

MUSIC

2020 News CONOR MCCARRON
Park Bench Retrospection SAMMY FLEMINGTON
Silicon Resonance SHANE CRANOR
Stars DAVID J. GARRETT
Wiggly Bop SHANE CRANOR

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It was a typical Saturday afternoon as my friends and I sat around a small table in the local cafe. We sipped our lattes while we worked on our latest artistic creations. The scent of pencil shavings and coffee rich. We sketched, laughed, erased, until the gorgeous Texas day called us outside. When I stepped out I saw a woman standing over an easel, paintbrush in hand, trying to perfect her landscape. I stopped to admire her work and pay her a compliment. I told her I was an artist too. She awoke from her fervent fever and looked into me, “As an artist, you need to hear this. You are young so I hope you won’t need this anytime soon: there will be a time in your life when you experience some heartbreak; that is inevitable. But if you channel your pain into your art, that is when it will come alive.”

I have carried those words in the back of my mind for the past five years. In that time I have experienced many forms of heartbreak, but no single instance gripped me to the paper and sparked my creation.

Now I believe the woman did not mean that the experience had to be isolated, or my own. This past year has in ways been heartbreak for many people. With it, we have created. This journal is a glimpse into that creation. Flipping through these pages, I see pain was channelled; as was solitude, hope, resilience. I feel our certainty and ambiguity, fight and flight, storms and horizons, disenchantments, unnatural morbidity. The vessels that brought us home. This is that time.

We come alive.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jade Njo', written in a cursive style.

Jade Njo

Editor-in-Chief



IF YOU COULD WEAR THE RAIN

KEARA BARRON

I wish I could bottle the smell of rain
and give it to you
like a fragrance to wear on your skin,
a spritz of the sky

And the sweet scent would be with you always
like you belonged to the clouds,
your essence stretched between the mist,
woven into the fabric of those atmospheric guardians

And here it falls down to the surface,
dancing between the trees,
gathering on leaves,
wafting over pavement
and so there you are,
your scent so familiar
like coming home



MT. OF THE HOLY CROSS

XAN MCPHERSON



DOMESTIC SETTLING

S.Y. CHEN

Where the water winds there are groves
where lovers have been buried,
clasped even in death to each other:
unnatural morbidity.

As water, I know I shall flow, through predisposed beauty.
The deep crevasses will accept new scars from ripples.
The exuberant sun shall make smooth surfaces shine
and the valley will be flooded with fauna-feeding flora,
making groves for lovers to stash their tombstones.

Shall it be beautiful?
I have no doubts.
Expected elegance, inherited time and time again.

Unless I am not water.
I began knowing but now I am not so sure
and then where would I go?
Would any other existence surmount predisposition?
So, I, a daughter of water, could only be water in turn.

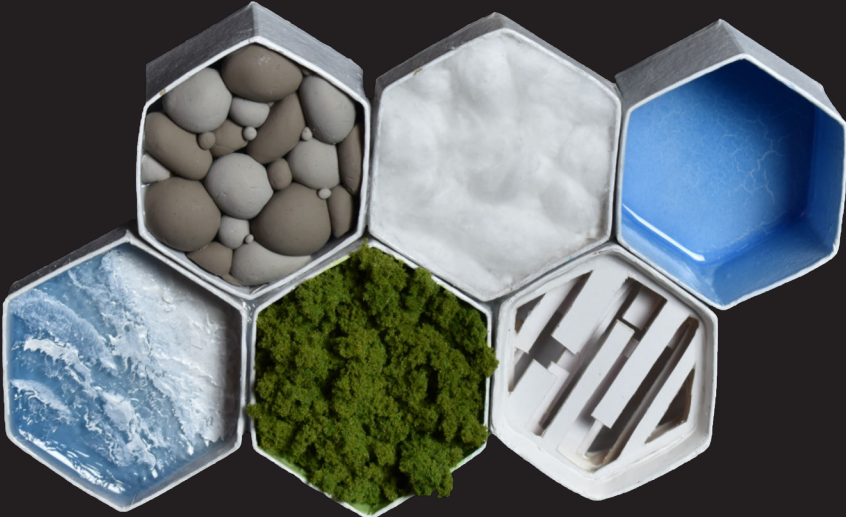
ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAPIDS

ANNA CHANDLER



CONFINED

LILY ABOUREZK



VASE OF WAVES

ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN



UNCOMMON FRIENDS

JACOB RICKEL



SONNET OF THE FOOL

ZABDIYEL TAN

I crept and dragged this shell across the earth
and higher things were silliness to me
Content, where all I have was all that's worth
and my defense was "Better safe than free"

'Till foolish bird from faraway I met
who stared into my soul from eye to eye
and through my shell sang this unlikely bet
"Friend, follow me, and I will make you fly"

"A tortoise cannot fly, do you not see?"
I heard no answer, but this much I know
that higher things became all things to me
and every word the Dove did say was so!

O bless the voice that set this shell unfurl'd
and called me Free and Stranger to the world

NATURE'S PORTRAIT

JACOB RICKEL





HEAVEN FOR THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

KEARA BARRON

Pen to paper.

This is about the duality. The way we float in whispers that are breathed between words, wisps seeking a path in the wind, a direction, a hope. And yet, life goes on on the surface too. Like flower petals riding the ripples of a pond. Nothing more, nothing less, but everything just beyond the surface reaching toward the rays of light that penetrate the glassy division.

“Hello?”

“Sorry.”

“Lost in thought? You were staring into space.”

“Yes.”

“Any updates?”

A slight blush, creeping into my cheeks. Like a rosebush in the summer.

“No,” I say.

She smiles smugly. “Okay, whatever you say,” she sings. Knowingly.

A smile of my own escapes. “He hasn’t asked me yet.”

“Ugh. He will soon though, just you watch.”

We cannot help but talk like we're in middle school. I wonder if we will ever outgrow it.

We depart and later I am sitting at a small desk, the seat attached with no freedom to move. The distance between it and the desk is fixed. No hope for change.

In one of those rare instances when you talk about more, just more. I mostly have these conversations with myself.

"I want to believe, I really do," I tell the little girl walking beside me.

"Then just do."

"I can't. I would like to believe in the big things, the unknown, like life after death, but it just seems like a contradiction in terms, you know?"

How can you really know? You don't. You just hope, and hope is the fabrication of mankind so that we do not lose ourselves in despair. We give ourselves a purpose so we feel important, when really, how can we be more than just tiny dust fragments in the universe, a blip in time?

"What if hope is certainty?" the little girl suggests. It doesn't make sense that she can even talk like this. I never actually talked like this when I was her age. The mature words fit her tiny, kid voice all wrong. Like mismatched puzzle pieces.

"The assurance of all things," she adds. "And our size and longevity are not related to our significance, but our mere presence is. And that we are loved."

That doesn't answer all of life's questions. It doesn't answer them at all.

I stand up, practically peeling myself from the desk. Back into the hallway, with all the people filing around me. I scan face after face, searching for those I know without even realizing it. That is the treasure hunt of people-watching.

She appears out of nowhere and clutches my arm. "Let me know what happens!"

"I—" I laugh, grateful for her enthusiasm and investment in my life. "We have lunch together often, you know that. Friends do that."

"Today's the day, I just know it."

Eventually, I walk outside to our usual spot. On the ground, under the oak tree.

"Hey."

"Hey."

A smile, a breeze, a slice of sunlight. All the little details line up perfectly and I think,

how can this be life?

She walks beside me again, letting me think out loud, adding my two cents to the matter of duality. “If there is no purpose, no God, there is no hope for life after death, you know,” she says.

“I don’t think you can even say that much. There’s just too much unknown.”

“No there’s not.” Her kid-voice sometimes annoys me. The intonation, the inherent sass and air of confidence when she knows so little.

“I guess it makes sense though? What purpose is there to our existence if we are just a product of perfect conditions?” So we have what we have now, and after our expiration that’s it.

She crosses her arms. Likewise, she is frustrated with me. And sadly disappointed, maybe because it’s the only future she has to look forward to. The inevitable. I once tried to tell her that the more you know, the less you actually know. And the less you can be certain of, the less you can hope in. Just like the inevitability of discovering the truth about Santa Claus.

“You know what’s a contradiction in terms? You, classifying humankind as nothing more than chance animals, yet hoping for more.”

“That’s because hope is a fantasy, it isn’t real, and we’re wired for it to keep our heads up, to look forward to something when there is nothing.”

“Consider that you could be wrong.”

“Hey, I wanted to ask you something.” After some conversation, the usual stuff, he was finally bringing it up. I knew it. Are you free on Saturday? Do you want to grab dinner—but, not like the other times. Yes, yes I’d love to. And it’s simple as that but still exciting to tell and experience.

And just as exciting to hear about, apparently. She twirled once. Yes, yes, I knew it!

I just don’t know.

“You still have some type of faith, you know. In science, in what you see, or something.”

I wish I could have your faith again. I look upon myself, the version standing next to me, and wonder. Is there a remnant of our younger selves that is always with us?

Will she always be with me, nagging and tugging at the corners of my thoughts that lay my very foundation?

I just don't know. I feel like I am without a light, lost in my uncertainty.

"Hey. I'm looking forward to Saturday." It's always a good thing to give them some confidence. A reward for the risk.

Life goes on, with sprinkles of exciting moments, as we ride the waves of the surface.

BOBBY THE OTTER

ALEX CLYMER



CENTRALIA

KAREN KLOSKE

fog rolls in, blanketing
gentle rolling hills
muting vibrant green forest
the grey sky hangs low
overhead
a stillness, with no others to be found

take a seat upon warm ground
watch the road from nothing to nowhere
fissured asphalt disappearing beneath a riot of color
search for steam venting from the earth

look for fire
burning for decades
spreading tendrils through
seams and cracks and
tunnels long abandoned

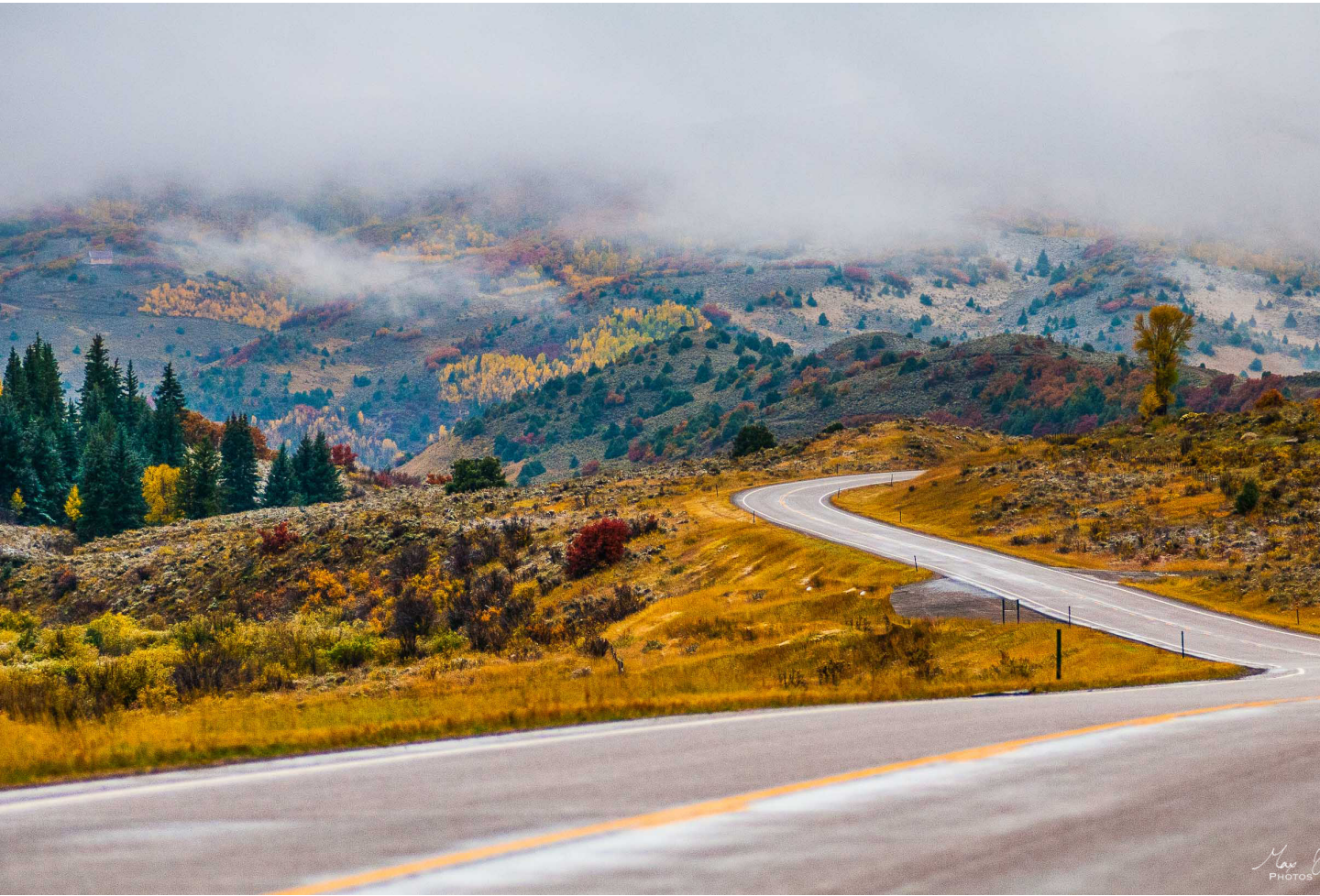
here, there was a town
roads still trek through empty
fields
where new trees grow

coal burns to ashes
poison escapes to the sky
from voids in the earth
gaping mouths open wide
with crooked fissure smiles

the fire breathes
and advances onward

SEASONS COLLIDE

MAX PHANNENSTIEL



Max
PHOTOS

BREAKING DAWN

JESSICA FIALA





SHELTER IN PLACE

WYATT HINKLE

Deep in the exalted deserts of southern Utah, a small, decrepit shelter stands beside a dry creek bed under the watchful gaze of sentinel cliffs. Its cracked stucco walls have peeled away to the ground, revealing an ancient clay frame in mid collapse under the constant tug of gravity. Above, a scathing wind pushes an endless march of dry clouds across the spacious light blue expanse of sky. As the sun travels beyond the distant eastern horizon, stars begin to circle their perfect arc before vanishing beneath a new curtain of blue sky. Heat radiates downwards and upwards off miles and miles of cracked sand, and the clouds continue their trek ever westward. Stars replace the sun, then are replaced in turn. Glittering black circles to blue only to be chased around again by the encroaching dusk. And always, *always*, it is dry.

Until it begins to rain.

This always dry creek bed wasn't always *always* dry. Once, it flowed.

The rain falls steadily, rushing in tiny rivulets that carve gouges in the unaccustomed sand. Huge outflows of water cascade to the ground from cliffside heights, landing with thunderous proclamation. The creek begins to swell with a slough of muddy water that laps up against the side of the dusty, wasted shelter.

After some time, grass begins to peek through the soft mud, followed by bushes, shrubs, and flowers. The creek flows clear, the rain having pushed away the softer sand to reveal firmer clay below. Eventually the whole shore is covered by lush trees with spreading leaves that scatter the splashing rain into tiny sparkling droplets. The shelter below is safe and protected, nestled in a comfortable glen.

And people move about outside. A family, man and woman and small child, dressed in buckskin tunics and dresses, with thick black hair that flows to their shoulders. They work to weave long, thin branches along the walls of the shelter until the entire structure is fortified. The child works slowly, getting distracted and scratching pictures in the soft walls. The mother laughs and carries them inside, and the father joins soon after. They remain there for a while.

And the rain keeps falling. Soon the leaves above are unable to keep the down-pour at bay, and water splashes resolutely down into the glen. The creek begins to push past its banks, flooding into the shelter and covering the grass in the glade. The structure starts to melt, collapsing under its own soggy weight, and the young mother and father, alone, begin to disassemble it. They carry armfuls of branches, feet sinking into grassy mush, and eventually the walls of the shelter have all flown downstream, leaving behind a pile of huge, old bones that had formed supports for the walls. The family is gone.

The creek continues to rise, slowly, covering the bones first in a layer of water and then mud. After a time, only the tip of a huge rib bone juts above the bank.

Two young boys run along the shore of the river, covered in muddy furs with browbones that jut out and protect their eyes from the rain. They are happy, laughing and splashing and playing. When they stumble on the rib bone, they work together to slowly tug its lengths from the slippery mud, falling to the ground as it finally breaks free. One of the pair runs off, returning with a larger group. They begin to search the banks, pulling up more bones and striking the smaller ones with stones to hone their points. As night falls, they gather their new tools and walk towards the cliffs, and they do not return.

And the water continues to rise. The banks of the river surge beyond the trees, pouring over roots and creeping upward to the base of the towering cliffs. As the sea approaches the caves above, the bone carvers return their tools to the water and sail away into the distance on hollowed out canoes. The bones sink slowly down, coming to rest on a bed of silt, where they lie still.

The ocean grows steadily, surging higher toward the clifftops, inch by inch, until it crests beyond their peaks and forms an unbroken expanse to the horizon. Under the surface it is calm, and the sound of rain fades slowly to silence with each moment the tide rises higher. Light grows dim, and soon it is pitch dark.

In the depths, the bones assemble, pulling together the fragments that have been carved away and linking end to end into a single massive skeleton. They gather energy from the cold water, coalescing into a solid body with ever so slightly more gravity than the empty black around it.

It swims away.

On the surface it is finally dry, and a bright sun emerges from the clouds to trek steadily westward across the sky. The bones, oblivious to any events above, continue to swim. They take the shape of a whale, almost, only much longer, serpentine gracefully between tall stalks of seaweed and kelp. Small schools of ammonites and ichthyosaurs dart away from its shadow as it passes, keeping distant from sharp teeth jutting from a too-small head. Occasionally a fish strays too close, and its bones join those of the shelter, for a short time.

I stop to take a photo of the crumbling shelter through the window of my car, too lethargic to step out into the heat of broad sunlight. I'm alone on a dirt road that leads into a tangle of canyons two miles and a million years north of the roaring stretch of interstate 70. Four lines of tire tracks disappear up the otherwise unmarked road, two from my passage and two from my return.

There's native American rock art in the canyons, blood red sketches of armless mummies, four-legged creatures, and symbols for rain carved by people thousands of years in the past. Clovis carvings mix with Anasazi paintings and more recent graffiti from settlers and modern trespassers. I have photos of all of it that I will probably never pull out again, memories to attest this twenty-minute expedition into nowhere. I tuck my overheating phone away and massage my eyelids to stave away the fatigue from squinting. I should have brought sunglasses.

As I drive slowly back towards the distant hum of the interstate, I hear the endless wind whistling through the crumbling wreck of a shelter, high pitched like the distant call of a whale. Drinking greedily from a water bottle, I wonder who in their right mind would choose to build a shelter here, where it never rains.

GERMI-NATION

SUSAN FENDER

Patchwork quilt of Amarillo fields
stitched together with rows of neatly
cultivated corn, cotton, citizens.
Without trees, what will keep this blood-red dirt in place?
Buckle of the Bible belt
cinched tightly around tradition
unlatches only to lash
weeds who dare to grow
outside organized rows.

Farming the Earth teaches
change is a tradition in itself.
How can you judge weeds
before you know what fruit they will bear?
Open your fists
it is time to plant new seeds
before we starve.

HERON HOME

MARK BALDWIN





YAK AT HIGH ALTITUDE

JESSICA HIATT



STAY IN YOUR LANE 2019

REBECCA MICHALCZYK



TRAVELER

ERIKA STROMERSON

You will be free: *run*

from storm into desert of woods, tangle in sacred heights and falling snow and weight,
heavy weight, great weight that clings, yearns to shed; pause in gardens where gods
whisper, where streamlets bend and bow and carry sacred water to your lips;

there is the peak: *you will be free*

home in green and fern and tree, bowl of tea, sky like light through leaves as you find soft
and quiet ground to occupy, extending skyward, buried by soil, by rain, by sweetness of
green singing softly to you

you will be

free

CHAOTIC ODE

KYLE MARKOWSKI

*A performance in three acts after Aireà D. Matthews
featuring the music of Ravel and Shaw*

i)

The curtain rises on one small safe harbor, one boat, one man (or boy, at this distance, indistinguishable; listed in the playbill: "The Actor"). Calm water. One violin frenetically tunes up. A storm appears on the horizon. The violin strikes three notes pizzicato in quick succession: Pluck-Pluck-Pluck; the storm arrives.

The full sextet plays: three violins pizzicato, in a round, stacking and falling probabilistically (the waves). The viola arco, digging into the strings with every other stroke of the bow, creating a haunted moan (the wind). The cello arco, quick bursts of dissonance (the lightning). And the double bass pizzicato and arco by turns, mic'ed inside the body, and occasionally hit with an open hand (the thunder). A shriek erupts from the soundsystem, static, then a booming voice (listed in the playbill: "The Director").

this boat
cresting waves
hardly sur
mounting gun
wales of no
margin—

yet the hardly
man arm
to rudder
outsteering
the bay—

clouds
heaving cumulo
nimbus-bridled
horses of
heaven hunger
sweet discharge—

yet the hardly
adept bare
facing deep
sea craving sky
outsteering—

slate
wavegreyheave
foam
whitehoundteeth
crash
freedsteedstampede—

stunning—
ceaseless—

*[Caroline Shaw's **Entr'acte** plays. The audience grows restless as the stage set slowly changes].*

ii)

The Actor now sits at an open window, soaked. The window is framed by garishly twisted, rotten wood. A projector casts a thunderstorm across the scene. In the pit, a man and a woman (listed in the playbill: "Parental Figures") sit at either end of the piano's bench. They play like two halves of a whole; fluid sonatas pour forth, like rain against glass.

Then, in quick succession and with muffled arguing, gesticulating and tugging at one another, they fall out of sync; lightning and thunder echo from under the piano's lid. The Actor turns to the pit at this sudden disturbance. The Director's voice comes over the soundsystem.

O please O
you forgive
interruption dream
on you at the window
dream on—

O so ro
mantic maverick
unmoored
you lone some arm
of pluck face
peril—

boat horses
hounds foam fleck
gunwales
hardly home
must be nimbus—

there up sky yes
indeed solitary
cumulo detritus cumulo
tears unsteer
able paths—

O windows wide in rain
gun wales wood
sills wet
warped variable harm
of neglect—

home
silencebegstorm
fight
breathcatchflesh
drown
headtobedpillowoverhead—

stunning—
ceaseless—

*[Maurice Ravel's **Pavane pour une infante défunte** plays. The audience, exasperated, files out. From the stage this resembles a slow, processional dance].*

iii)

The stage is bare. A painted backdrop shows a single burgundy door against a white background. The Actor steps from stage right and strides to center stage. His lips move in sync with the Director's voice issuing from the soundsystem.

O, so, the truth, then. Aye, so often I deflect; hardly reflect; construct some elaborate labyrinth, weave words or immersive imaginings [*gestures to the sextet, the piano, the stagehands*]. But here, like Prospero, I reveal the Tempest for a trick [*the front curtains*

sweep in; the instruments clang discordantly as their players drop them and join the stately procession; the house lights come up]. It is always a distraction, a center of entropy and I'm pulled by its gravity [the curtains slowly move forward, engulfing the Actor, until just his face and one arm extend out]. Him, at the helm, he's a fantasy. Grasping eyes, phantom limb, autopilot.

Here, now, I am not alone.
Here, now, I release myself.

*[The rigging fails
the curtain drops.*

*The actor is
seen
hand-in-hand
with another man
disappearing
stage left].*



RED WHITE AND BLUE

TALA TAHERNIA



GUARDABARRANCO

VICTOR BAEZ

Hermoso pájaro de Nicaragua
Sentado en el jardín
Lejos de todo y en Paz,
Pero usted está en Guerra
Llorando y sangrando en silencio.
Todos sus colores brillan brillantemente
En la tempestad
Esperando a que la lluvia lave
Sus pecados y heridas.
Con el alma del águila
Volará hasta los cielos
SI DUELE RESPIRAR
NO SE RINDA
Las fronteras no te aprisionarán
En el infierno.
Porque en todos sus colores,
Vos llevás la esperanza
De un país y de una gente

El pueblo está en las calles luchando por vos

The beautiful Nicaraguan bird
Sitting in the garden
Away from everything and at Peace,
But you are at War
Crying and bleeding in silence.
All your colors shine brightly
In the storm
Waiting for the rain to wash
Your sins and wounds.
With the soul of the eagle
You will fly up to the heavens
IF IT HURTS TO BREATHE
DON'T GIVE UP
The borders won't trap you
In hell.
Because in all your colors,
You carry the hope
Of a country and a people

The people are in the streets fighting for you

VIOLATION

JANE TUREK



INTERVIEWING THE AMERICAS

S.Y. CHEN

I. The Spanish took everything, and Christ was the only thing they gave

The sun shines into the church forming the fourteen stations of the cross,
the colors draping over my seventeenth year
This memory comes in a vessel like the wine I carried:
to be seen and not tasted.

Can the lips which spoke harsh words, produce a smile so genuine?
As I proffer communion to him, he looks over the audience:
a boy who called himself Hernandez not David
to be unshakable in his heritage.
Striating the lineup, waiting for confirmation.

II. I don't even know the history of my family, where we came from.

My heritage shadows the streets in Germany
But in the Americas, his heritage crumbles into speckles on the countryside
where the dying languages cling to the ruins
and young school children gawk at their roots grasping for survival,
grafted into museum shelves

The tourists and civilians walk among mystic heights;
their boots dancing on the death of an ancient civilization,
the perceived survivors of the Spanish invasion

III. We lost our language then, and now we must lose Spanish too?

The conquest never finished:
“SPEAK ENGLISH TO ME” is the new decree
what else must be forgotten for the demands to cease?

What empire would have gone and fallen
if those sails were defeated by windy seas?
Where would we have met? On the shores of Mexico, Honduras
or somewhere that would have kept its name?

Which language would he speak to his mother?
What gods would he pray to with his sister?
Would Hernandez have a home in his tongue, his soul, and his skin?

DANCING FIRE

MARC A. HERRERA



A PLEA

REBECCA MICHALCZYK



EX(PATRIOT)

WENLI DICKINSON

Where will we go?

The tides: lapping (laughing) at my foolishness. Making a home out of inconstance. I saw the stone and chose wood. I saw the sun and chose ice. My solace is tenuous—

Imagine all your bones shaped like a scythe. Each connection is a disconnection, you bow out with the weight of it.

The deserts cry out for water far from alluvial origins. I call out to your dry bones. In response, your silence shrouds

our slumber / meals together / the suffocation of sustenance.

Late in the evening, our breath twines itself with empty air. We burrow into the night (armor from morning). You dream of setting the whole ship on fire

though you are already burning.

What actions does a flame have when the fuel is spent

We go when we go.

I can't complain. This is the course we charted together. Every storm torments you but you refuse to take shelter. You play captain; I, the hostage enraptured in all this demise.

Destroying dry land, living as exiles from ourselves. Insanity is love and love is insanity.

Every day we stand trial. Debris litters the bedroom floor; wounds in the sails; the sickness that grows in the body and infects the space between us; any lust for life is reckless, abandoned:

The Evidence Is Presented. Each day a brooding sigh judges whether we are fit to sail on
(guilty, for now).

The hurricanes come and you weather them only to sledge-hammer through walls, through load-bearing beams.

The mountains last and last and last

(laughing at us).

I think of you, organic and dying—the oceans flood sierras older than
(your)

love. It flows from me; and you, dying and diseased, remain indifferent. I'll remember you this way

because that is how you charted it.

Your salt is the essence in that water, I will still taste you after you are gone.

Where will I go.

COLORFUL REFLECTIONS AT ECHO LAKE

ROBERT REEVES





SILENCE INTERLUDE

KYLE MARKOWSKI

late night bath in a Tallahassee motel

bathe in darkness

bathe in silence

Fear erupts from shallow water

FLIGHT

RYAN PARK





TENSION

LILY ABOUREZK



W
I
N
D

S
H
A
N
E

C
R
A
N
O
R





PULLMAN PUPPETEER

KAYLA SCHLICHTMEIER



ALICE

JADE NJO



DREAMSTORMING

MELANIE BRANDT

Lucid clouds are wondering
What you are thinking

They ponder your shape
your shifting form
your mesmerizing textured expressions

They well up with tears
at the thought of your sadness

and their bellies swell with joy
erupting in thunderous laughter
at your inside jokes

They argue about whether you look like
a mouse running with a kite and a string
or a diamond ring ready to slide upon an outstretched hand

They strain with the effort
to make you burst
apart
and float away
in diverse directions
carried by the wind
a mind stretched so thin and wide

It is everywhere
and it is

n o w h e r e .

YEARNING

ROBERT LEE





DARK ARTS

LILAH SLAUGHTER



TRANSIENCE: A GUIDED MEDITATION

KYLE MARKOWSKI

“He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma during his sophomore year of high school. At the time of his diagnosis, Victor felt... that his ‘sense of bodily invulnerability had been shattered.’ ”

Malone et. al., *Individual Experiences in Four Cancer Patients Following Psilocybin-Assisted Psychotherapy*

Consider a glass medicinal bottle with a dropper top held at the crux of your palm and fingers, the hand curled just enough to hold it.

Inhale; the bottle becomes clear. See the hand underneath, lined at each joint, a portion of your lifeline exposed.

Exhale; the bottle becomes an opaque blue, the color and transparency of the ocean six hundred feet down.

When you exhale, can you be sure that hand, those fingers, that palm is still there? Normally, object permanence would tell you yes. But the bottle is changing color, and with your breathing no less.

Exhale. Object permanence is out the window. Inhale. It returns, the impermanence. Object meta-permanence. Exhale.

Inhale. Look up. Check the window: does it also change? Exhale, and you are plunged into inky blue. Inhale. Now your brother is standing outside. His eyes just barely pass the sill. Exhale. Did the color of the panes change in time with your breath? And what of the pain? With whose breath does it coordinate now? Will your brother disappear? Will you?

That plunge, the dissolution of object permanence, just on the exhale, and do you dare inhale again, for fear there is only this blue to breathe?

How would you rather die: drowning or not knowing? Perhaps object permanence is equivalent to the smooth muscle of the diaphragm, ultimately out of your control, sure to let the blue rush in unwelcomed.

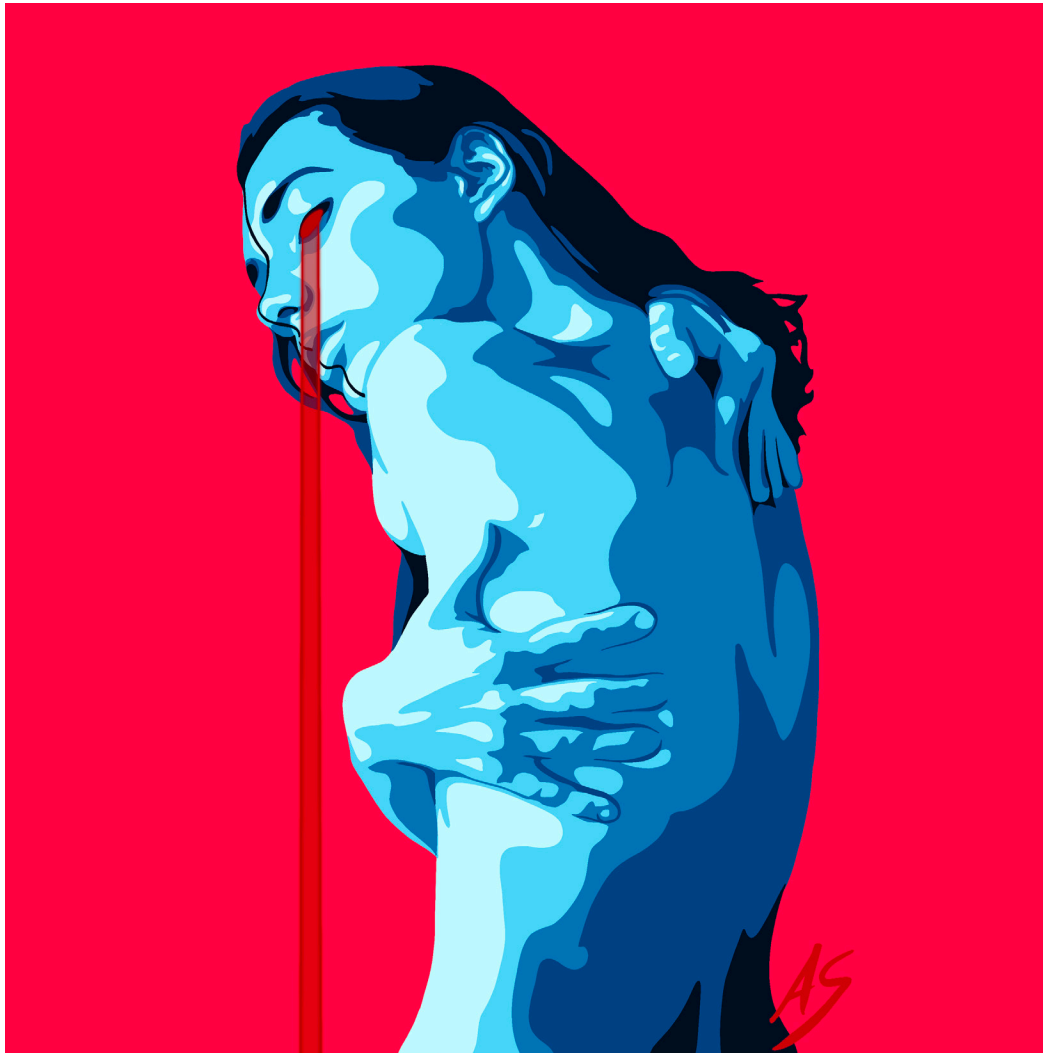
When your brother awakens (next week, in a month), your mother at the foot of his bed, the room is suddenly—what? airless? brimming blue? Perhaps this is the origin of shallow breathing: unwillingness to let it in.

Are the depths of the ocean a void, like nonexistence? Is death a void? Does it have such a transient border? Perhaps you enter death; perhaps death enters you. Untenable dichotomy—death leaves a void in your wake

Exhale.

BLOOD SHOT

ANDERSON SALISBURY



PISTANTHROPHOBIA

ALEXANDRIA LETO

Dark clouds rolling
to mind, impending storm
blackening the sun
over lucid oceans, untethered
emotion breaking surface
like iridescent fish,
can't stay: gasping for breath
after moments in dimming light

SLOTH

JADE NJO



SNOW SICK

MAYA MAES-JOHNSON





EXCHANGE

WYATT HINKLE

The bathroom smelled abrasive, a thin layer of sickly-sweet chemicals barely masking the heft of odor hiding below. Ana sat cross-legged on the lid of a toilet, feet tucked tightly against her legs so they wouldn't slide off the smooth porcelain. Below the stall door, she watched as a pair of polished black high heels clacked across the linoleum and paused in front of the stall. The door wiggled slightly, then the shoes turned away. Nearby, a toilet flushed.

Ana had her arms wrapped around a tattered backpack in her lap, clothes visible where the overflowing flap struggled to close. Where her hands met, they clasped a hand carved wooden token of a boar and two piglets curled up asleep in a bed of leafy plants. Her thumb tapped along a ring of notches around the rim of the token—*one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight*—and she flipped it over to the other side, where several crude initials were scratched into the wood.

“Hey, I think this stall's empty,” a child's voice called out, followed by a pair of small sneakers that danced up onto their toes as the stall door shook.

“Hey, Li Jing, don't be rude, that door is locked!”

The shoes turned around. “But look, no feet!” Four tiny fingers wrapped around the bottom of the stall door, and Ana watched the sneakers spread apart as the child made to crouch down. Quickly, she unwrapped her legs and slid her feet to the floor, flicking the stall lock and whipping the door open. The child—a small girl with short black hair tied into two pigtails—jumped back in surprise.

“Excuse me, sorry.” Ana heaved her backpack into place as she rushed past the pair, mouth tugged into a forced smile that scrunched up the skin around her tired eyes. As she ducked around the corner into another inescapable wave of commuters at the subway station, she overheard the child trying to appease her embarrassed mother.

“But, no feet...”

• • •

They called her the boar whisperer ever since she was seven. Tío Héctor came up with the title, said she was the kind of child that deserved a nickname. In the Mecoche Peninsula, where the rainforest grew thick enough to hide many soft magics, boar were known to wander into the fields on the occasional spring night when the sky was clear and the wind silent. They left no trace, save a handful of hoofprints and a path of crops that grew twice as strong in the coming season.

Ana was the only one to ever lay eyes on them, late one night while she was out watching the strawberry moon. She would spend entire days wandering the dense groves of rainforest by herself, sugarcane staff in hand that slowly grew shorter as the day went on. That night, something called her to stay out a little longer, and so she sat herself in the hard jungle dirt by the fields, waiting. All of a sudden, sleek fur parted the stalks of cassava like ships slicing through an inky black sea. A mother boar and two piglets, silent and serene, surrounded by an aura of radiance as they glowed silver in the moonlight. Ana stayed out until sunrise, imagining the magic running through the cassava plants as they unfurled and grew impossibly slowly in their wake. And thus, their blessing was conferred to her, if Tío Héctor was to be believed.

• • •

After spending fourteen hours on long distance high-speed trains, Ana had expected to be greeted with the miles of towering skyline the city of Qinshu was so famous for. Instead, in the three hours since she disembarked, she had yet to see anything but a variety of dank, crowded indoors. She felt like a rat running in a maze, with no idea when she might find the exit.

She sat at the front end of a subway train, staring down the long line of cars behind her and trying to get a bearing for her movement. They bucked and curved away into the distance, as if she were inside the brightly lit stomach of a snake writhing in a void. Each car was crowded end to end with people, sitting and standing and rocking gently back and forth with the undulations.

That was the worst part about subways, she had decided in the last hour. Not the unpredictable movement, or the cold fluorescent lighting, or even the changing pressure that constantly tugged at her aching eardrums. No, the worst part was the sheer, relent-

less presence of *people*. It was the way she had to pull her elbows in toward her sides to avoid accidentally bumping the woman sitting next to her. It was the tiny gaps between bodies where she had to carefully direct her gaze to avoid making eye contact with someone who always happened to look back in that exact moment. Her face felt stiff and rubbery from constantly steadying her features into a careful neutral for the viewing of hundreds of eyes around her. Even her breathing was rigid, made extra quiet so that nobody could violate her privacy and listen to the inner workings of her lungs. She tried to focus her attention inward, to the token she held in her hand, drawing small comfort from its presence.

Across the aisle, a middle-aged woman was breaking custom and staring openly at Ana. She wasn't the first to do so, but her gaze was so intent, so magnetizing that it pulled at Ana no matter where she turned her own eyes to look. It felt like a challenge, the woman's lips lifted ever so slightly into a smug grin that invited Ana to do who knows what. Look back at her? Stare her down in return? Leave? She made eye contact briefly, probing the deep unknowns hidden in the woman's shameless face, then averted her gaze as far as she could.

She saw a man sitting with his legs spread wide, taking up two seats with his stance as he buried his face into the phone held sideways between his hands. Beside him stood an elderly woman holding on to the center pole in the aisle for support, legs shaking ever so slightly. The loose skin beneath her chin vibrated gently along with the rumblings of the subway train. She appeared as though a sudden turn could send her flying to the floor. As Ana watched, the lady turned to look at her, sitting in her seat. She looked away.

Ana had fought desperately for this seat, jostled all the way to the end subway car to find an open spot to rest her throbbing feet. She shuddered at the memory of standing at customs, rocking back and forth in place on the hard linoleum floor to give each screaming foot the tiniest moment of relief. She thought the bones might actually have broken at the time, given up and collapsed flat onto the ground. The security guards seemed convinced that her documents were fake, and apparently that meant she needed to keep standing while they figured it out. "Never seen shoes like that before around these parts," gesturing to the woven leather huaraches her father had saved for weeks to have made for her. She'd never seen someone with such long nose hair around any parts. "I don't know, Andy, what do you think about this one?" "Send her down to line 6."

It had, in fact, taken *three* line changes for Ana to make it through, adding at least an hour to her trip. If she survived the next few interchanges and made it to her hotel, she would be sure to never stand again. Or let herself be seen by others. She traced her thumb around the edge of her token—*one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight*—and screwed her eyes shut.



Tío Héctor had been whittling the boar token for weeks by the time the letter arrived. He left soft brown fingerprints on the envelope when he brought it inside from the walkway, stained from the wood he constantly held in his hands. Ana was surprised to see him carrying mail—they didn't even have an official mailbox, just a little container in a patch of palm fronds with a handwritten sign for deliveries.

“Mail?” she asked.

“It's for you,” he said with a knowing grin.

The whole house gathered in their tiny kitchen, clamoring to get a glance of the letter that had found its way there. The room was not built with the needs of eight in mind, but it bore the scrapes and bruises from doing so for many years. As the family crowded around the scuffed dining room table, their toes silently accepted the weight of others treading across them, and their elbows fit snugly against the sides of those nearby. The ceiling grazed gently against the hair of tall Cousin Theo, who had forgotten by now the instinct to stoop. Between their shared breaths, the air was stifling, stirred only by the tarp-covered window where Papá's elbow had gone through years ago during a particularly rowdy evening.

“What does it say? What does it say?” cried little Dante, trying to squeeze his head past Isa and Paloma.

“Stop shoving, you can't even read,” Isa shouted, shoving him right back.

“It says,” Tío Héctor revealed after a moment. “Notification of Acceptance into Qinshu Cultural Exchange. It would seem that Ana's headed into the city.”

Ana felt the room go silent and loud all at once as everyone, including herself, reacted to the news. Mamá gripped Papá's shoulder so tight that she could see the fabric of his shirt bunch around the fingers. Isa gaped up at her in shock as if she were a whole new person, a celebrity in the making. Even Theo's eyes shone with wonder as he tried his best to look skeptical. Everyone knew this was the sort of news that changed lives, picked them up and turned them straight on their head. It was tough to breathe under the heavy weight of their rapt attention.

Only Tío Héctor seemed unsurprised, a smug grin spreading across his cracked yellow teeth as if he were the one that made the letter appear. “I told you we had good luck coming our way,” he said, holding up the in-progress token. “Our boar whisperer's finally claiming her fortune.”

That night, after rounds of cheering and dancing and shots of homemade aguar-diente, Ana escaped to the calm of the rainforest. She felt the ghosts of praise and hands

patting her back as she sat on a large rock, scratching meaningless markings into the mud with a long stick. It was drizzling, and the gentle patter of water dripping from the leaves above helped to quiet the roaring in her mind.

The Qinshu Exchange. When Ana applied to the program, she wrote of adventure, of traveling and experiencing life outside the Mecoche Peninsula. But it wasn't real. Nobody really believed in the exchange. Sure, most would apply, when children came of age and invitations were received in the mail. But after that, nobody ever heard from them again. And the rumors of success stories—young adults whisked away to the prosperous global capital Qinshu, remarkable apprenticeships, endless cash funds flowing back to families—they were just that, rumors, with no more weight than the stories Tío Héctor attached to every stray feather he found in the rainforest.

But now that it was real? Ana had seen it in their eyes that night, the deep sense of need that flared up from the darkness. Even Mamá couldn't ignore the fact that they had been struggling for so long, that this could be a chance to escape their circumstance. So, if they hadn't taken a moment to think of Ana, whether she really wanted to go—if they had looked straight through her to the salvation she could provide—well, she couldn't really blame them. She swirled the stick in an inward spiral in the mud. It wasn't exactly like they were sentencing her to a life of misery. A two-year stay, if she decided to come back at all, in the center of the world. The fabled opportunity of a lifetime. One she had, in fact, applied for.

Lost in her reverie, it took Ana a moment to notice the boar tracks mixing with her scribbles in the mud. Shocked, she bent down to get a closer look. They were small, and isolated. She followed the tracks through the soft mud, past nose marks from sniffing, a patch where the animal had rolled, and into a thicket where the piglet still lay, curled up against the roots of a tree.

Ana squatted to the ground in amazement. “Are you lost?”

The piglet looked up at her, gaze steadfast and unafraid. It didn't seem lost. After a moment, it rolled to its feet and trotted out of the thicket. Ana watched as it wandered bravely into an open field, confident and alone.

She made up her mind.

• • •

“Coming through, sorry!”

The man didn't even notice he had bumped into her, but Ana stumbled and the carved wooden boar token went flying out of her hand into the air. Its impact with the concrete on the edge of the subway platform was silent, drowned out by commuter foot-

steps, but she felt it jarring deep in her bones.

“Wait,” she breathed in shock as she regained her balance. She reached out the train doors to where the token rolled on the ground, but was quickly wrenched backwards, doors snapping shut inches away from her face. Through the glass, the token teetered over the platform edge and disappeared into the gap beside the train.

“Are you stupid?” A tall man glared down at her with one hand on the back of her collar. Dark eyes and sharp cheekbones cut deep with the weight of his reproach. “I’m not waiting here while they clean up your severed head.”

Ana looked back helplessly out the window to see that the train had begun to pick up speed, leaving her token behind. She imagined it falling miles into the endless black, or worse, getting crushed by the train wheels, shattered helplessly against their cold, unfeeling weight.

“Hello? English?” The man mimed a door closing shut on his neck. “Fucking foreigner....”

• • •

“Here, mija, Héctor wanted me to give you something before you left.” Ana and Mamá stood together on a commuter train platform, trying not to count the seconds to departure that slipped away with each passing moment. Mamá reached into her small bag and pulled out the token Tío Héctor had been carving.

Ana gingerly grabbed the token and inspected it. It was a beautiful portrait of a mother boar and two piglets curled up together in a field of cassava. This was the first time she had seen it up close, and she was surprised her uncle’s hands were steady enough to carve in such detail. She could almost see the rise and fall of their ribs with each sleeping breath. “It’s beautiful,” she whispered. “These are the boar from that night?”

Mamá nodded. “He said he was carving it for the family, to *act as a beacon for the fortune bestowed upon you.*” She waved her hands in the air, mimicking him with a large smile. “But since you’re leaving now.... He thought you should have it.”

Ana stared intently at the boar. Every detail, from their posture, the shape of their ears, even the way their fur parted, looked as if they were brought to life straight from her memories. “What are these notches?” Ana gestured to the seven markings encircling the token.

“Those represent all of us, our family. Héctor had each one of us carve our mark today while you were getting ready. And don’t tell him about this,” Mamá continued, “but we all carved something on the back for you too.”

Ana turned the token over to see an assortment of crude scratches grouped together in clusters on the back.

“Our initials,” Mamá said while laughing through tears. “You probably can’t tell.”

Ana reached to hug her and the two sat there crying and laughing together for some time, trying to identify which initials belonged to who. She felt bad, leaving everyone else behind at home, but one extra ticket on the rickety local bus to the station already threatened their finances enough as it was. When they left Papá at the door, she could feel the guilt penetrating his gaze. He understood, but to be the one left behind. . . . It was a tough choice.

“Here, finish the circle,” Mamá pulled out a small knife and handed it to Ana.

“Mamá, the security,” Ana looked around furtively for any officers nearby.

“Shh, it’s okay, hurry.”

Ana took the knife and gingerly scratched an eighth notch on the bottom edge of the token, completing the ring around the circle. Immediately, she felt a comforting presence traveling up her arm, like the way it felt coming home to the smell of ajiaco cooking in the kitchen. “Now, no matter where you go, we’ll all be with you. I know Héctor’s a little much sometimes, but—”

“No, I believe it, I do.” Ana was surprised to find that she meant it. “I’ll make sure to take you all with me everywhere I go.”

• • •

Ana couldn’t stop imagining the broken bodies of the boar sitting in the grimy darkness of the subway tracks. She felt as though she herself was in that darkness, watching the world through a long tunnel that started miles within herself. As she struggled to pilot her body up the endless set of cement stairs that led, finally, to the surface, she felt the fading tether to her family unraveling her with each passing step. By the time she reached the top, she had receded so far inward that she barely even noticed her surroundings. Nonetheless, her eyes widened at the sight that greeted her.

A building soared out of the ground like a massive spear, disappearing into the high fog and leaving unknowable heights concealed above. Another tower stood nearby across the massive plaza, this one adorned with architectural spheres and flashing neon lights along its windows. Huge, elevated walkways flowed with people, and across the river in the distance more buildings shone high in the sky with colored lightshows. Finally out in the open, a wild breeze zipped along Ana’s skin, exciting her tired muscles and loosening the muddled thoughts from her hair. Her lungs opened deeply to the expanse of brisk air around her, somehow made larger by the extreme reminder of vertical space

above. This was the Qinshu she was expecting when she arrived.

As the fresh air teased apart the dense knot in her chest, Ana began to tear up, shocked out of her numbness. This was her home for the next two years. It was massive, and it was beautiful, and she was here alone. Absolutely, utterly alone. How could she think she was capable of such a big change when she had barely even left her village before? How could her family have expected this from her? The next two years yawned open in front of her like an inescapable pit, and she felt herself falling in as crowds continued to rush around her.

She pulled herself out of the center of the plaza, aware of eyes watching her, and shuffled toward a corner where she could hide.

“Oof!” Ana collided with an object as she stumbled against the flow of traffic. A woman and boy were walking out of a corner dumpling shop.

The woman looked mortified. “I’m so sorry, my son and I were just looking up at the—” The woman paused. “Hey, is everything alright?”

Ana tried to regain her composure. “Oh, sorry, yes I’m fine.” She sniffled. “This is just my first day in the city, I think my hotel is just over here.”

The woman looked Ana up and down, taking in her shoes and demeanor. Her dark eyes widened in sympathy. “Oh, I know it can be an overwhelming place at first. Hey, here’s an idea. Why don’t you get some dumplings with us, they’re just the thing to shake off the jitters. We just had some, but Niao-ka here was begging me for seconds.” She gestured to the boy hiding tucked beside her, who smiled meekly.

Ana wavered, debating just finding her hotel and collapsing into bed to never rise again. Maybe if she hid from the orientation counselor, they’d let her wither in peace. “No, I couldn’t....” Her stomach rumbled fiercely.

The woman’s eyes narrowed at the sound. “Come on, our treat! They’re the best in the city, we promise.”

Ana resigned herself to be guided toward the glass door, where a logo was printed in white. “Gold Star Dumplings” wrapped decoratively around a circular emblem. In the center, the resplendent portrait of three boar passing through a grove of bamboo.

“You coming?”

“Yeah, um, yeah sorry.”

The boar stared calmly out at Ana from the door, stirring a familiar impression deep within her. As she walked past the threshold, she felt the sensation of coming home.



W A I T I N G

W
I
L
L
I
A
M
H
U

A
X
E
L

K.
V
U
L
E
T
I
C
H



We were winding our way
on roads like ghost towns

through arches puffing
massive chests wrapped

in sandpaper gowns, fabric
woven of sunset-colored striation

flecks of mica set like fine jewelry
passed through archaic generations.

Wind seeps into cracked car window,
carrying film of orange clay,

sticking strands of hair to damp skin, mocking
Me, a dare not to admire

its tedious power: like a bluejay
collecting straw, building home

It will be here when we can no longer pick
dust from our fingernails

PERSPECTIVE

DHRUVA SOGAL





LOAM

BRETT B.E. PROBST

Something stung my chest and I crumpled, falling to rest in dense and knotted grass. It was near nightfall and the stars were just beginning to crack the heat and humidity of the jungle when I found myself with nothing more important to see. I'd caught a glint in the corner of my eye, off my squadron's path. In my staring, I'd missed the first signs of the ambush.

The musty air of the forest filled my lungs in weak repetition. I watched the canopy overhead knot and breathe. In time, I became aware of a ragged wound in my upper back. Now packed with vegetation, it leaked away into the loam. A man crossed into my view. His face was unfamiliar, framed by a dingy helmet and plain collared shirt. He met my eyes with a telling look—not of his story, his friends or family, but of his motive. How they needed him, how cornered he felt, his remorse and excruciating righteousness, his sadness for me and his disgust for us. I'd like to think I could understand.

He moved away into the dusk, out of my view. Once again, I was alone in my heavenly vigil, floating under the great dome, its many pinpricks and incisions. A loud crack off to my side. I tighten my grip on my rifle. A coldness in my chest as my back hits earth. A shadow in the corner of my room.

NOVEMBER NOSTALGIA

S.R.J. LIKITH

Sodium Vapor Lamps...
The yellow sunlight, with an orange hue.
Yes, they have them here in the States too!
Stirred up a sepia storm, he shed a tear.
Acting on stage, and off it too.
No comforting faces either way.
Accolades, what do they mean anyway?
A gentle, yet jarring reminder
that he was to fend for himself forever.
Solitude. By now, an old friend.
Difficult, yet comforting in the end.
Only one to know
his milestones, see him grow.
It's been more than a decade now
so many changes, yet somehow...
Sodium Vapor Lamps
the nostalgia is strong
but this time, so is he.

SOLIDARITY

ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN



WHO ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

JACOB RICKEL





EARTH HOUSE

JAYNE MACKE

I ran my hands over the steering wheel, trying to convince myself I wasn't making a mistake.

It's what Granddad wanted me to do, I reminded myself. Plus, it would be stupid to turn back and waste another twenty-minute drive. I *had* to go inside.

The hillside washed over the little house to my left, its roof sloping in the middle like a bow. Earth houses usually had a man-made feel; they were built by bringing up the soil and packing it around a house's exterior walls, in hopes that a grassy hill would grow around it. This house seemed like it had been swallowed up by the hills themselves. Long grasses and stray roots hung over the siding. A splotch of sunlight hit the green door, glinting off a diamond-shaped window in the center. It twinkled at me like a star or a watchful eye. It made me feel braver, somehow, if I pretended it was Granddad's eye looking over me.

I got out of my car and walked the cobblestone path to the earth house. As I got closer, I noticed what I thought were weeds growing in the window boxes were actually herbs. Waxy basil leaves and feathery dill brushed against the shutters, as if they were trying to knock on the window. Pausing in front of the door, I ran through my lines again, but before I got past "hello," it swung inward.

A small old woman with daisy-white hair stepped into the doorway. Despite the heat, she wore a black shawl over a gray tunic and trousers. Her feet were bare on the hardwood floor, with toenails painted pink.

“Can I help you, dear?” she asked.

My voice squeezed its way out.

“Hi, Ms. Carrier. I’m Tori Howe, and...I think I’m your granddaughter.”

Ms. Carrier—or Vera, as she’d asked me to call her—poured black coffee into two mismatched mugs. I sat on an overturned five-gallon bucket, since Vera didn’t have another chair for her kitchen table. The room was crowded but tidy. Drying flowers and herbs hung in the corners; the counter and table were covered in jars of oats, fruit preserves, and vinegar. The whole house was like that—at least all that I’d seen of it on my way in. Books piled up in the living room, stacked on every flat surface. It was pleasantly cool inside, naturally air-conditioned by the earth that surrounded the house.

Vera joined me at the table, taking a long drink before speaking.

“Tori,” she said, testing it. “Tori Howe. And your grandfather was...”

“Thomas Benham. My mother is Susan Benham-Howe.” I rubbed my thumbs on the dull edge of the table.

Vera nodded. I found it hard to look her in the face, so I stared at her hands, wrapped around the cup. Her knuckles were red, like she’d been washing dishes in hot water, and she had deep, rounded nail beds like I did.

“Did Tom tell you about me?” she asked.

My turn to nod. “Yeah. A little.” I cleared my throat, squirmed in my seat. “Well, it was kinda indirect. He told stories.”

“What kind of stories?”

“Made up ones,” I said quickly, though I didn’t think it was true. “About, like, magic and talking animals and, um...”

“...and witches?” said Vera.

I finally looked up at her. She wasn’t who I pictured when I was little. When Granddad talked about a woman in the woods with powers and secrets and a cottage in the hill, I’d imagined someone wicked. But, as strange as the earth house was, Vera seemed normal. Almost like a grandmother, which I’d never had.

It was hard to feel angry at Vera for leaving us—it was hard to feel anything towards her.

“Yes.” I answered her question. With the word out in the open, my voice came more easily. “He said you made medicine. You control the weather. He said deer came right up to your door and told you things.” I paused to sip the bitter coffee. “Something about that fascinated me, when I was little. The image of a deer walking up to a doorway, whispering...I always asked Granddad what the deer talked about, but he didn’t know.”

I paused, studying Vera for the signs of family. Her mouth pinched at the corners, like Mom’s, and she fidgeted like I did: her hands were never still, always tapping, rubbing, picking. Her movements weren’t like nervous habits, though. I watched her index finger loop inside the handle of her mug. It seemed purposeful, confident—but I couldn’t figure out why.

“And he never told me you were my grandmother,” I continued, sitting up as the words peeled away from me. “Not until the very end. He said ‘Tori, it was all true.’ He said it skips a generation. Mom thought it was just some crazy last words—he wasn’t all there, in the end—but I knew that wasn’t it.”

My hands trembled, so I pressed them flat on the table. It was strange, recounting Granddad’s words, especially after Mom had thoroughly written it off and banned all discussion of the topic. Maybe she did believe it, deep down, but she didn’t want to think about what that could mean for me. I couldn’t blame Mom for worrying, but I’d absorbed some of her anxiety. To steady myself, I breathed in the scent of the earth house—a sugary lavender smell along with something woody and sour.

“I’m sorry for not being there,” said Vera. I didn’t know if she meant Granddad’s death, my childhood, or something else. All of it. She angled her face downward. I could see the top of her lined forehead and into the spirals of her white hair.

“Why weren’t you?” I asked, allowing a little bitterness to trickle in.

Her silence clawed at me.

“Granddad said you died in childbirth,” I said. “With my mom. That’s what everyone always thought.”

“Yes, I know. I suggested it.” Vera picked up her mug, swirled around the remaining coffee. She sighed. “I don’t normally do this, but seeing as you are family...”

She tipped her mug, the dark liquid spilling out on the table. I flinched, scooting back awkwardly on the bucket—but the coffee pooled into an even, round puddle the size of a dinner plate.

“Lets see,” Vera leaned over the puddle. “This was about two years after I first met your grandfather.”

Our reflection wavered in the puddle—Vera’s pursed lips, her concentrated face, and mine: flushed skin, wild hair and eyes. I looked more like a wicked witch than she did.

The reflection was disturbed when Vera swept her fingers through the coffee, but another image took its place as the circular puddle stilled.

In sepia tones—either from the dark brown coffee or from age, I couldn’t tell which—there was a man lying on the ground beneath a tall sycamore tree. He was clearly dead—his leg was bent underneath his body, his face pale, his chest still. I tore my eyes away from him—the liquid draining out of the mouth, the whites of the eyes—and noticed the pegs hammered into the tree trunk, leading up to a ledge built into the nook of three large branches. It would have been a long fall...

“Is that... *Granddad?*” I asked, daring to glance at Vera, who was also watching the scene play out. She shushed me, never looking away from the table.

The eye of the vision swept away from the dead man. The image located itself on a deer hidden in the underbrush. Its head swiveled, its nose quivered—and it took off silently. Its white tail flashed once before vanishing into the trees.

The ghosts of the forest. My brain automatically supplied Granddad’s words. I thought of the dead man and shuddered.

As if it read my mind, the vision returned to the man, further away this time. The deer strolled into the picture, nosing the man’s shoe. A young woman followed it, her hair long and curly, like mine, like Mom’s. But, as the image zoomed in on her, I realized the young woman was, of course, Vera.

Her eyes were wide like the deer’s, and they shimmered with tears that wouldn’t fall. She pursed her lips, emotion draining away as she knelt. Her hands twitched into complex shapes above the man’s chest—*Granddad’s* chest. It was like sign language or shadow puppets, except it only lasted a moment before Granddad’s ribcage rose and Vera grabbed his shoulders, pulling his torso into her lap. Color rushed into his face. His eyes lifted, meeting Vera’s, and he smiled dreamily. Hair fell into her face as she tilted towards him, laughing or crying. He reached up, cradled Vera’s face, then dropped his hand to rest on her belly. It was only then that I saw the bulge—she was pregnant.

A hundred images flashed over Vera and Granddad: antlers and eyes, a scribbled line of ink drying on a page, blackbirds, stars, cloud lighting in a tornado-green sky, a gold wedding band dropped into a palm, and dozens of other things that went by too quickly to discern.

Then the puddle went dark and shrank until it disappeared. The table was blank

and dry. I checked Vera's mug—and yes, it was full of black coffee again.

I sat back down on the bucket. Questions scribbled across my mind—too many.

Vera didn't wait for me to speak.

"He fell while he was putting up a deer blind," she said, looping a white curl behind her ear. "He wasn't dead, but it was a close call. I was all the way in town, but I felt it in my hands, and the deer told me the way—I'm sure you know what I mean by now."

She nodded at my hands, which had braided together like tree roots. I dropped them into my lap, but I did know what she meant—the jumping, aching, staticky feeling in the bones of my fingers—it had been with me since Granddad died.

"I know you're angry at me," Vera continued. "I don't blame you for it. If I could have stayed with Tom, I would have. If I could have raised Susan, I would have. If I could have found you sooner—"

"Why couldn't you?" I shook my head, an attempt to unclog my brain. "You and Granddad were so happy together. You saved his life!"

"We were happy," Vera rubbed a spot on her ring finger. "I loved him, and yes, I did save him. And that's why we couldn't stay together. I would have kept saving him and your mother and, eventually, *you*. I would have done *anything*, and that's dangerous for everyone. Tom and I decided together. We both knew it was best."

Pain etched into the lines of Vera's face, the corners of her eyes. Her otherwise implacable face grew sad, tired. For a moment, she didn't seem mythic and untouchable like the character from Granddad's stories. She seemed lonely.

"But what's so bad about using your...abilities?" I asked.

"It's unnatural," said Vera. "It's enough to be a woman, to be a little bit strange, to live alone—" she gestured around at the room "—it's *enough*. Believe me, it gets ugly when people are confronted by things they don't understand."

I spread my hands on the table. My fingers hummed from within, the magic feeling I'd grown used to. I thought of Vera's confident, fluid movement and the swift signs she'd made in the vision. In the tangle of my feelings, there was still anger—but I also didn't understand her yet. And if she could teach me things about myself, I was willing to do the untangling.

"I want to learn." I watched Vera smile as I spoke, like she'd known what I would say. "But I'm not sure I'm ready, yet. I think I will be, once I process this a little more. I mean Granddad and...the other thing."

“That’s okay, Tori. Just come back here when you are.” Vera said, nestling my right hand into hers. “*Yet.* The most important word.”

The sun was down, so Vera lent me one of her shawls to wear out. We stood in the doorway of the earth house for a moment. Her white hair looked silvery in the darkness. Outside, tree frogs chirped and lightning bugs flashed low in the grass. Vera wrapped me in a tight hug before I took the cobblestones back to my car.

When I glanced back at the earth house, Vera had disappeared back inside, the door shut. The diamond-shaped window glowed from the light within. I headed towards my car, feeling Granddad’s and Vera’s protection over me.

As I got closer to my car, I noticed a set of eyes beneath curled antlers in the treeline. I heard Granddad’s voice in my mind again—*the ghosts of the forest*. As I approached, the deer didn’t run, and his features became clearer. Ten feet away, five feet, three. I stopped. We stared at one another.

“One day, you’ll tell me what you know,” I said. The deer’s tail flicked. “And I’ll listen. One day. *Soon.*”



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

LILY ABOUREZK

Lily is a freshman at Colorado School of Mines in the BSE program. She did sculpture throughout her high school career. She loves small animals, tea, the snow, and perfecting her espresso-making skills. (As well as engineering skills, she supposes).

VICTOR BAEZ

Victor Baez is a sophomore in Civil Engineering from Allen, Texas (near Dallas). A lot of his poetry draws on his experiences in life and in Nicaragua where his father grew up. Nicaragua is known for a love of poetry and Victor continues in that proud tradition. Since Victor incorporates his experiences from Latin America, some of his poems have a bilingual twist to them or are 100% in Spanish. In his free time, he enjoys playing soccer, snowboarding, or just about any other sport.

MARK BALDWIN

Mark Baldwin earned degrees in Engineering Sciences from Purdue University. Before entering academia, he served in the United States Air Force as a missile man and worked at NASA in charge of ascent flight design for the Space Shuttle. Mark is also one of the early founders of the computer game industry having written, programmed, designed, directed, and/or produced over 30 commercial award-winning computer games including "Game of the Year." He has been teaching since 2004. Mark's expertise is in the field of simulations and modeling and the computer entertainment industry.

KEARA BARRON

"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

kearabarron.wordpress.com

MELANIE BRANDT

Melanie Brandt is an unabashed dreamstormer. Her eyes are often trained on the sky—gazing at stars, feeling enveloped in blue, or staring at clouds—and wondering who or what might be looking back at her. She is poetic only in brief and unexpected showers of words. Her inspiration for most things in life is found in wonder and beauty and love with a smattering of the absurd. Her favorite creative medium is humor.

TARA BUZINSKI

Tara is a third-year chemical engineering student at Mines. In her copious amounts of free time, she bakes bread, gardens, and practices yoga.

ANNA CHANDLER

Anna is a first year student at Mines just trying to get through her physics and chemistry classes by taking a break to paint the beauty she sees all around her in Golden, CO. She was born in Iowa and raised in Georgia, but having lived here 5 years, she now considers Colorado her home. She loves skiing through snowy forests in the winter and hiking beside flowing rivers in the summer, but if the outdoors aren't an option, she's more than content to snuggle up with a good book and let her imagination handle the exploring. Although she's an engineer in mind, Anna will always be an artist at heart.

S.Y. CHEN

S.Y. Chen is a half-Taiwanese American from a small town in NorCal. She is passionate about representation, discovery, Star Trek, and finding junctures between art and science. She spends most of her time reading, writing, and making sure her experiments don't go terribly awry. All of her works are dedicated to her cat and her incredibly supportive partner.

SHANE CRANOR

Shane is a computer science student who makes weird music and does freelance photography. Check out more of his work at shane.cranor.org.

WENLI DICKINSON

Wenli Dickinson is a water resource engineer, rock climber, and Rabbit Mom living in Colorado. She is honored to continue to be a part of *High Grade*.

ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN

Dr. Düzgün is a professor and Fred Banfield Distinguished Chair in the Department of Mining Engineering at Mines. She has a joint affiliation with the Department of Computer Science. She is also the mother of two sons, a drummer, and an entrepreneur. Düzgün is passionate about ceramics. She enjoys experimenting with patterns and forms representing the dynamic nature of earth and human systems. She has been on the journey of this experimentation for more than 15 years. She worked with various ceramic artists and was involved in ceramic exhibitions in Turkey and Germany. Düzgün believes that art is one of the essential stimuli of innovation in engineering.

SUSAN FENDER

Susan is an ice cream enthusiast who is less concerned with being a poet and more concerned with simply being poetry.

JESSICA FIALA

Jessica (or Jess) has always loved painting and finds much inspiration from Bob Ross. She enjoys painting landscapes the most and organizing Bob Ross paint nights at Mines. She is from Durango, CO and loves the southwest. In her free time she likes painting, making tea, and baking.

DAVID J GARRETT

David Garrett, known on stage as Judson Moore, is seeking a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering at Mines. He has played guitar, sang, and wrote songs from a young age. His music can be found under "Judson Moore" on most platforms, including Spotify, YouTube, Pandora, iTunes, and many more.

MARC HERRERA

Marc Herrera has been all over the world and seen many different cultures before joining the community at Mines. With a passion for photography, he has fallen in love with sharing these different cultures with those around him. One of the most important lessons he has learned through his experiences is that although there are many things that make each person unique, one thing every person has in common is their humanity.

WILL HU

With a camera in hand and a water bottle nearby, Will takes photos with friends or alone, specializing in street photography and portraits. His love of photography began back in middle school and has flourished ever since.

JUN JOHARI

Jun is from Malaysia and pursuing a degree in Petroleum Engineering. She wants to be a graphic designer someday.

KAREN KLOSKE

Karen Kloske is a Chemical Engineering major from Florida. She is interested in both poetry and fiction, as well as nature, hiking, physics, and math. This is her first time being published and she is excited to continue developing her skills as a writer.

ROBERT LEE

Robert is a grandson of an illegal immigrant. His father grew up dirt poor in New York City during the depression. His father received a scholarship, earned an engineering degree, and was able to climb out of poverty. Robert also has valued a good education and is a practicing architect. Like good architecture, photography is a visual balance of technical expertise and creativity. As an amateur nature photographer, he is seemingly always planning, shooting, or “developing” the next great photo. The Bible states in Ecclesiastes 11:7 (NIV), “Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.” Keep your life full and sweet by including photos with dramatic sunlight.

S.R.J. LIKITH

Likith graduated from Mines with a PhD in Mechanical Engineering in the midst of the pandemic in 2020. Creative writing (mostly poems) has been close to his heart for a long time, but he only recently managed to gather the courage to put his work 'out there,' and being published in *High Grade* means the world to him. He doesn't really feel a sense of belonging or patriotism to any of the 3 countries (U.S.A., India, and U.A.E.) he has lived and grown up in; where he lays his head is home. Some of the things he is passionate about include, but are not limited to, music, education, pedagogy, literacy (including technological literacy), linux, (more widely accessible) technology, the intersection of coding and STEM (education), and mental health. He hopes to one day teach and not have to worry about having to go back to what he ran away from.

JAYNE MACKE

Jayne Macke writes poetry and short fiction, usually in the genres of fantasy or magical realism. She prefers to spend her time reading Terry Pratchett and Octavia E. Butler or wandering through an art museum. She is a student studying English and creative writing. She lives in Missouri.

MAYA MAES-JOHNSON

Just an orb trying to figure all of this out.

KYLE MARKOWSKI

. . .regrets to belatedly inform Alex Leto, Jade Njo, and Toni Lefton that he was unable to submit a bio in 2020 due to unforeseen circumstances involving will'o'the'wisps (*ignes fatui*, 'giddy flames,' Latin); thousands of them; they were the stars; they descended as the stars over the course of seven hours and were perceived by the neural-network-consciousness-proxy socially (mis)understood to be Kyle Markowski, geographically located on the salt sprawl called *Caribe* (aboard *S/V Nibiru*, 'Point of Crossing,' Akkadian). Crossing the jungles and fording the estuaries, Chad discovered the ancient wild man (*Enkidu*, 'Lord of the Good Place,' or 'Creation of Enki,' Akkadian). Efforts persist to study his species-*polymorphic* ('to fill form,' Greek) behaviors (primarily ferret, mink stole, mouse, nuthatch, & rabbit.) Luna, paramour of the sun (*Aya*, 'mother goddess,' Akkadian) could not be reached for comment—her presence is nonetheless felt.

CONOR MCCARRON

Conor McCarron is a junior studying Chemical & Biological Engineering. Conor is a Golden native, a first generation American with Irish and Canadian roots. He is a certified Audio Engineer and enjoys creating music. Conor spends his free time playing a number of musical instruments, including guitar, bass, piano, and drums. He has penned, recorded, and released original music on streaming services and was featured in the 2020 E-days concert. Currently he is working on a concept album inspired by the experiences of living through the COVID pandemic and how the world has reacted to the virus. Conor hopes to use his degree to pursue a career in the biotech industry.

XAN MCPHERSON

Xan is a Senior at the Colorado School of Mines in Engineering Physics and will be graduating soon! When she is not studying, she loves to ski, draw, paint, snowshoe, and camp. She is excited to take a year off to explore the world and create as much art as possible before pursuing a PhD.

REBECCA MICHALCZYK

Rebecca is a Colorado native originally from Bailey, Colorado. She is studying Mechanical Engineering and will be graduating May 2021. After graduation, Rebecca will be working as a full time Systems Engineer at Raytheon IIS. Rebecca's favorite hobbies include painting, rock climbing, and spending time with her Kappa Alpha Theta sisters!

JADE NJO

Jade's favorite band is currently Blind Pilot. She highly recommends their album *And Then Like Lions* as it consistently inspires her. She leaves with this quote from their song "What is Yet:"

Flock and feather, tied into each other / And we're born in, burning / To return to one another. Wake up my sister, / Doesn't the road sound nearer, your road farther away? / And no, it don't come easy. There is a wave's weight over me but / I Can hear you say, / 'You don't have to be the only one. You don't have to be the golden sun. Breathe and let it set. You can see it in the way we need. You can breathe it in the cedar leaves, blowing smoke and sweat. We can see it in the pale light. We can see it in each other's eyes. Here, all for what is yet, all for what is yet.'

MAX PHANNENSTIEL

Max is a graduating senior with a Bachelor's degree in Engineering Physics and a minor in Computational and Applied Mathematics. His photography has taken him to more than 30 countries all over the world, where he has photographed some incredible scenes. He was born and raised in Vail, Colorado, and his fondness for nature has led to a life full of fishing, cycling, camping, skiing, hiking, and spending time outside. He plans to return for a Master's degree in Quantum Engineering. Visit www.maxjphotos.com to see more of his work!

BRETT B.E. PROBST

Brett is a Master's student in Metallurgical & Materials Engineering. He likes to play loud music with Jack (as Animal Friends) or by himself (as Strange Sundays). He thinks he'd probably like to be your friend if this book wasn't in the way.

ROBERT REEVES

The intersection of engineering and art has always fascinated Rob. Photography has provided the outlet for his fascination, especially the nighttime shots that blend stars with interesting foregrounds. The colors and shapes that are visible to the camera at night, like the photo of Echo Lake west of Denver, provide the magic that inspires him to endure the cold and isolation of roaming his timberline adventures. Rob brings his enthusiasm for art to his classroom where he teaches mining engineering in the Professional Master's program.

KAYLE SCHLICHTEMEIER

Kayla Schlichtemeier is a sophomore at Mines studying Computer Science and Data Science and minoring in the McBride Honors Program. Her favorite art media to work with are charcoal and colored pencils. She is honored to be a contributor in this year's *High Grade* journal.

DHRUVA SOGAL

Dhruva Sogal is a first year student at Mines. Originally from Portland, Oregon Dhruva enjoys spending time outdoors with his camera capturing wildlife as well as human subjects in nature.

ANDERSON SALISBURY

Anderson Salisbury grew up in Austin, Texas. Both creating and seeing artwork has been very influential throughout his entire life. Recently, he transitioned to creating art in a digital medium. He seeks to display beauty and evoke emotion with each of his digital pieces. His future plans include continuing to build his own art brand and unique artistic style while also inspiring others to make and express themselves through their own art. He is inspired by this Vincent van Gogh quote, “As I work at my drawings, day after day, what seemed unattainable before is now gradually becoming possible. Slowly, I’m learning to observe and measure. I don’t stand quite so helpless before nature any longer,” as well as the wisdom of Dr. Seuss, “Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try.” To follow and see more of his work, visit his Instagram profile [@anderson_draws](#) or [@sanitythready](#).

ERIKA STROMERSON

Erika Stromerson is an emerging writer and poet, often exploring the blurred lines between natural and human structures. She graduated from Mines with a B.S. in Civil Engineering in May of 2020. She is an enthusiastic member of Mines’ literary and arts community. She has had works published in *High Grade* since 2019, and has had works published in the literary journal *Humana Obscura* since Fall/Winter 2020. She hopes to find more homes for her poems in 2021, publish a collection, and enter graduate school to study environmental humanities. She is ecstatic to have “Traveler” published in *High Grade* this year!

ZABDIYEL TAN

Zabdiyel Tan is a graduating senior in Computer Science specializing in Robotics and Intelligent Systems. He works as a teaching assistant for PHGN100 Introductory Mechanics (AKA Physics 1), and reserves a special place in his heart for LON-CAPA, Physics 1’s infamous course website. Since becoming a Christian in his Freshman year, he is an active member of the Navigators campus ministry. He hopes to pursue a Master’s Degree in Robotics here at Mines. He leaves with this quote:

“For the wages of sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
— Romans 6:23

JANE TUREK

Jane is a sophomore at Mines majoring in Chemical Engineering. In her (limited) free time, she likes to slackline and create angsty art. I mean, who doesn't? If you ever want to see her, try looking for the chick wearing Hawaiian shirts and double denim on Kafadar.

JULIA VAUGHN

Julia is a sophomore in Chemical Engineering. She enjoys painting, playing ukulele, and overthinking the meaning of everything.

K. VULETICH

K. Vuletich is a Denver based muralist and multimedia artist. Often incorporating trash and found objects in her art, she aims to re-purpose and create something compelling from something that would otherwise be unwanted. In 2018, she received CCI's Career Advancement Grant and was a recipient of DAV's Urban Arts Fund. These grants gave Vuletich the opportunity to expand her collaboration with under-served youth and to continue experimenting with multimedia installations. In 2020, Vuletich started The Big Delicious, an art collective focused on interdisciplinary collaboration and public access to art.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The call for submissions is open to the entire Colorado School of Mines community. Only original works are accepted. Submissions are taken in the Fall semester and considered for acceptance. All literary submissions must be in a Microsoft Word document. Limit one submission per document. Art submissions should be in .jpg or .png format. Music submissions should be in .mp3 or .wav format. Please submit through our website, highgrade.mines.edu. Limit five submissions per contributor per genre.

High Grade
Stratton Hall 413
Colorado School of Mines
Golden, CO 80401
highgrade@mines.edu